

Testimony

House Bill 1320

House Education Committee

Monday, January 24, 2005; 8 a.m.

North Dakota Department of Health

Good morning, Chairman Kelsch and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Kim Senn, and I am director of Coordinated School Health for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 1320.

Separate and distinct from physical education, recess is an essential component of the total educational experience for elementary school children. Studies show that children need a variety of movement experiences to develop healthy bodies and minds capable of learning.

Inactivity is a major risk factor for serious health problems, and patterns of inactivity often begin at an early age. As a result of parents working outside the home, neighborhood safety issues, and a lack of community support, a growing number of children have limited time to participate in unstructured play in their neighborhoods. They spend more time watching TV, playing computer games or engaging in other sedentary activities. The result of this inactivity, coupled with poor nutritional habits, is that more children are overweight and obese and show early signs of heart disease, diabetes and other serious health problems. The involvement of young children in daily physical activity during school hours therefore is critical for their current and future health.

Recess provides children with discretionary time and opportunities to engage in physical activity that help to develop healthy bodies and enjoyment of movement. It also allows elementary children to practice life skills such as conflict resolution, cooperation, respect for rules, taking turns, sharing, using language to communicate, and problem solving.

Recess also can facilitate improved attention in the classroom and can result in enhanced cognitive abilities. Studies have found that students who do not participate in recess have difficulty concentrating on specific tasks in the classroom, are restless and are easily distracted. In addition, recess serves as a developmentally appropriate strategy for reducing stress.

Various organizations including the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the American Association for the Child's Right to Play support recess as an important component of a child's physical and social development.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.